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AUTHOR Blake, Robert W.
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ABSTRACT

The guiding principles by which the Albion (New York) school district developed its written composition curriculum guide include two basic assumptions about the learning/teaching of composition skills and eight other assumptions that reflect salient features of the composing process. The fundamental assumptions are that writing can be taught and that everyone can learn to write. These assumptions can be realized across the curriculum if students maintain an awareness of their message, their audience, and their role in presenting the message to the audience. Students also must be familiar with the stages in the composing process (described in varying terminology and detail, but generally grouped as prewriting, writing, and revising activities), the types of writing or modes of discourse that exist (identified in various ways by Aristotle, the National Assessment, James Kinneavy, James Britton, and James Moffett), and some specific composition skills that need particular attention (sentence combining, grammar, diction, standard usage, and literary conventions). Teachers can help students learn those things by using workshops as part of their composition instruction activities, and by providing accurate writing assessment/evaluation, such as with a holistic rating scale. (RL)

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R A T I O N A L E

COMPOSING AS THE CURRICULUM

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A Guide for Instruction

in

Written Composition, Grades K-12

Robert W. Blake

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Albion Public Schools
Albion, New York
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RATIONALE

Introduction

The "Rationale" presents the theoretical foundation for the Guide. For each part of this section, an assumption states what we take for granted, what we "assume" to be valid for the material in the Guide. In the section on "Sample Writing Activities" will be found actual lessons, tested and refined with school children, which reflect how the theories are put into practice; these lessons demonstrate the practical application of the assumptions and theoretical statements.

Underlying the "Rationale" are two fundamental assumptions:

Assumption 1: Writing is a complex intellectual skill which nevertheless can be taught. We can't teach the genius of a Nathaniel Hawthorne or a William Faulkner, but we can make available to students the techniques which these writers--and all accomplished writers--use as they produce effective writing.

Assumption 2: Everyone, unless he or she is mentally retarded or psychologically damaged, can learn how to write. Just as we all learn how to speak, we can learn the complex skill of writing effectively by learning how to move through at least these stage.

--deciding for ourselves what to say.

--gathering information, ideas, and images from a variety of sources and by a number of methods.

--initially ordering the material we have gathered.

--writing down on paper a first draft of what we have assembled.

--revising the structure, ideas, and words of the first draft.

--editing the revision so it is free of mechanical errors (like spelling, capitalization, and punctuation) and inappropriate usage choices.

--possibly in preparing the writing for publication and dissemination.

Composing as the Curriculum: the Composing Process

The idea of "composing as the curriculum" is at the heart of the writing program and governs every aspect of it.

Before we discuss the stages in the composing process, we need to describe three major ideas, which, in turn, need to be kept in mind by writers as they move through the composing process.

The first idea is that of message. Writers must rely upon themselves to answer the basic question, "What do I want to say?" It is essential that writers discover for themselves what their message is to be, although they may use suggestions for direction from others. If they continually take topics from others, though, they will never rise above imitation in their writing.

The second idea is that of audience. "For whom as I writing?" ask writers. Is it a personal friend whom I know intimately? Is it a person my own age, who shares my beliefs and attitudes, but with whom I am not personally acquainted? Or is it a group of people not knowledgeable about my subject? Once writers have their audience identified, many problems about sentence structure, word choice, point of view, and tone will be solved.

The third key idea is that of the writer's roleor, to use the technical term, persona. Writers inevitable ask themselves, "What writer's role shall I assume? Now that I have decided what I want to say and to whom I want to address my message, how shall I project myself on paper? Shall I be formal but not stuffy? Shall I use the third person and write in a slightly distant fashion.

or shall I speak directly to the reader as a trusted friend? Shall I use formal diction, or shall I use words which convey knowledge without pedantry? Shall I use humor, irony, or sarcasm?" And so forth.

Writers who fail to keep in mind any one of these key concepts while they are composing will probably fail to convey their personal messages to identifiable audiences in a consistent style.

Stages in the Composing Process

Assumption 3: Students need to be aware of and learn how to follow through the stages of the composing process.

All experienced writers follow the stages of the composing process when they produce a piece which conveys a message to an intended audience in the language which they have consciously--and sometimes unconsciously--chosen. As inexperienced writers learn to move through the same stages, they can enjoy the satisfaction and pleasure of creating finished, controlled pieces of discourse.

Composing in writing is a complex process, made up of a series of acts in which writers keep in mind the key concerns of message, audience, and the chosen writer's role, while they are moving forward and backward, sometimes circling, with words, sentences, and larger structures, with activities in which the unconscious mind may be as influential as the conscious intellect, acts leading to pieces which writers seldom can explain until they have finished them.

Although we may despair of fully describing this process, many teachers of writing have, for instructional purposes, outlined distinct stages. Robert W. Blake and Charles R. Cooper label the stages as "prewriting", "writing", and "rewriting" (Cooper, 1975; Blake, 1976). Donald Murray identifies the steps as "prevision", "vision", and "revision" (Murray, 1975). In order to show how the composing process can be adapted to the practical concerns of the school classroom, Frederick B. Tuttle, Jr. labels the stages as "stimulus", "reaction to stimulus", "rough draft", "sharing/revision", "final draft", and "submission" (Tuttle, 1977).

Before we describe the "Albion Model" of the stages in the composing process, developed jointly by classroom teachers, students, and college consultants, we shall discuss in some detail the characteristics of the composing process which teachers of writing need to know intimately.

Prewriting. The first stage may be called "incubation" or "gestation", but to make the term parallel with those which follow, we shall call it simply the "prewriting" stage. The prewriting stage may span minutes, hours, or even years. Throughout this period, we draw upon our past knowledge and experiences and relations with human beings and with other creatures as the raw materials for the first draft. Writers frequently report they are unaware of what they bring to a composition until they begin jotting down notes or making entries in a journal.

For the most part, students spend too little time in classes with the prewriting stage. Writers produce convincing pieces only on those topics about which they already have a deep and intimate knowledge or about a subject for which they have assembled extensive information. The prewriting stage is the answer to the inexperienced writer who quite justifiably laments, "But I don't know what to write about".

We have learned to help beginning writers during the prewriting stage by engaging them in such discovery procedures as these:

--thinking
--remembering
--asking and answering questions
--noticing how things change
--contrasting
--reading and taking notes
--free writing
--writing dialogue
--playing with sentence frames and other such structures
--role playing and recording what happens
--brainstorming

At this point in the composing process, we must make every effort to prepare beginning student writers for the uncertainty all writers experience at the prewriting stage and help them to gain confidence in their ability to meet these fears, recognize them, and deal with them.

Within this prewriting stage, we include some sort of planning, many times nothing more than a scratch outline or a simple list of points, certainly not always the full blown outline with heads and subheads, sometimes in complete sentences, advocated by textbooks on writing. The fact remains that all writers do order their ideas and feelings to some extent before they begin to write a first draft, but beginning writers should become aware of the nature of the preparation.

Drafting. Some teachers of writing call this the "zero" draft. Whatever has happened during prewriting, this is the "moment of truth" for writers, the instant at which they take pencil or pen to paper or start typing.

The strategy here is to get students starting the physical act of committing something to paper, even though they know the words, ideas, or entire structure may change dramatically before the piece is completed.

These are the kinds of comments the teacher makes at the first draft stage.

--Okay. Start writing.
--Don't worry about _____now. (punctuation, spelling, handwriting, capitalization, format, paragraphing, etc.) Just keep on writing.
--Let it go. Trust yourself to find out what you want to say. Let your pencil (or pen) do your talking.
--Keep writing to find out what you think or feel.
--What you're writing is important to you.
--Don't worry. Just get your first draft down.

Essentially what we say to inexperienced writers at this "frustration" stage is something like this: "Now that you have gathered a lot of information, have read, talked to people, made notes, thought about your subject a great deal, and have made some sort of rough plan, just go ahead and start writing. Don't worry too much about what it looks like right now. Remember, this is a first draft and you will, of course, be revising and editing it."

Revising. Because they have no experience with composing, beginning writers believe that after they have written the first draft and made some minor corrections the composing process is over. The experienced writer knows that a new kind of work, far different from the initial creative burst, remains.

Some writers see revising at the center of the composing process and maintain that all writing is revising. Whether this is true or not, students need to know what experienced writers do during this stage.

When he revises, the author makes more or less conscious decisions about altering what he has written during the first draft. He tinkers and reformulates. He rearranges words, trying a different word in place of another, and possibly replacing the original. He deletes words. He tightens up by cutting out unnecessary phrases and clauses. He even changes the design of an entire piece, throwing away an extensive opening, moving complete sections around, and substantially revising an ending because the original structure of the piece has changed abruptly during the writing. He may even rewrite the entire piece, changing the tenses of all verbs, switching the point of view, altering the tone of the composition. Or he may even abandon the first draft altogether, at least for the time being, to turn to something else which flows more easily.

As inexperienced writers begin to realize all successful writers revise, they accept revision as a necessary step in composing, not some useless assignment created by the teacher. And furthermore, the students now assess realistically the polished pieces experienced writers create, respecting their revisions. No longer are they mystified by pieces so perfect they can't comprehend the process by which they were produced.

At the revising stage, it is essential to give student writers feedback about their first drafts, to provide them with specific directions and suggestions about refining or expanding what they have initially written. This can be best done by having them read out loud their first draft compositions to teachers or to each other in pairs or in small groups of from three to four other students. But we must assure beginning writers that what is said is meant not as destructive criticism but as recommendations for improving their writing.

Here are some revision strategies for the feedback sessions. The first few are identical to those used during the prewriting stage.

--comparing
--classifying
--noticing how things change
--identifying patterns, sequence of parts, or the relationship among parts
--asking and answering questions
--summarizing
--stating a dominant impression
--pointing out words, lines, or passages appropriate or inappropriate for given audiences.
--asking for additional information
--asking for clarification of certain points.

Editing. Perhaps for experienced writers, there are only three general stages to composing: prewriting, writing, and revising, until one stops. For some writers, the revising never ends; as one writer commented: "I never stop rewriting . I just let the piece go."

For inexperienced writers, it is necessary to add the final stage of editing, of preparing the manuscript for print. But there are varieties of print. For our purposes, editing means observing conventional editing procedures, of bringing a manuscript to as nearly a perfect state as possible. Teachers and students alike should be satisfied with nothing less than what editors call "good, clean copy".

Students may edit their pieces for the school newspaper, the literary magazine, or for an anthology to be printed in ditto or mimeographed form for distribution to other students in a classroom. It is essential, in fact, that

students do prepare some pieces for "print", so they can see the necessity for editing and become familiar with the process.

Activities such as these help students edit their pieces. As they work in pairs, in small groups, or individually with you, they will find the task of proofreading not as distasteful as it is done alone.

--reading aloud to a fellow student or in a small group to find errors in mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and usage)

--proofreading by the teacher

--identifying pairs or groups of sentences which can be combined

The "Albion Model" of the Composing Process

Based upon the writing of others on the composing process and on the suggestions by teachers working with their students, the following "Albion Model" of the composing process was developed.

1. Stimulus. A stimulus is any experience to which students may react in writing. including brainstorming, free writing, questioning, making entries in a journal, pursuing formal intellectual strategies, recollecting, or responding to a film or picture or literary work. It was agreed that a variety of stimuli should be used to ensure that the greatest number of students could find a stimulus to get them started writing.

2. Prewriting. One of the major components of this program is extensive discussion of the stimulus before writing. Most young and inexperienced writers lack confidence or experience to talk or write about various stimuli they encounter in classrooms. We wanted students, therefore, to put into words their reactions to stimuli for writing and to explore different ways of responding to these stimuli before they started the first draft. As James Moffett describes the activity, "The qualifying of thought and elaborating of sentence structures develop together. Outside the classroom this development through vocal exchange occurs all the time, but in the classroom it can be furthered deliberately by creating kinds of dialogue in which questioning, collaborating, qualification, and call for qualification, are habitual give-and-take operations". (Moffett, 1968, p.82). This period of discussion before first draft writing therefore constitutes an essential learning experience for students.

We were also concerned that during this prewriting stage students be given time to reflect between reacting to a particular stimulus and writing a first draft. such an incubation period is often neglected during the rush to "cover" a curriculum, yet effective writers know this stage is essential for thinking and pondering.

3. Writing. While all the other stages in the composing process may and probably should be interactive,--that is, individuals sharing with others their composing activities--the first draft stage is a solitary and often lonely one. At this time, the writer's main goal is simply to transfer thoughts to paper, to "get something down". Neither the teachers nor the students should be concerned with the mechanics of written composition during this first draft composing but only with writing out as fast as they can their ideas and feelings. During this drafting stage, beginning writers are encouraged to experiment with ideas and language, knowing there will be an opportunity to revise them later. To reinforce the idea of a very "rough draft" during this stage, we urged students to write down their exploratory thoughts on anything at hand, including scrap paper or used envelopes. By jotting down drafts on discarded paper, the students, we found, were less protective of what they had written in the first rush of creativity.

4. Workshopping. A crucial stage, but one often omitted in schools, is workshopping. After students have completed their first drafts, they should read out loud what they had written in pairs or in small groups of from three to four students, focussing on one or two specific elements of the draft. As they gain experience in reading their works aloud to others, students learn to detect gross problems in structure, audience, and tone as well as to identify and correct mechanical errors in spelling punctuation, capitalization, and standard usage.

5. Rewriting. Some teachers of writing make the distinction between revising--changing major elements of a piece like overall structure, openings, endings, audience, verb tense, and point of view--and editing--correcting mechanical errors before final submission for publication. For our purposes, we combine the two kinds of activity into the single category of rewriting.

Once the writers have revised their compositions so they are logical, forceful, and free of mechanical errors, they write the final draft for submission to an actual audience, not necessarily just a teacher.

6. Submission. This is the final stage in the "Albion Model" of the composing process. Having worked through the stages and revised and refined their compositions so they, their fellow students, and their teachers are satisfied, student writers submit their work to an audience--be it the teacher, other students, the school at large, or even to a national periodical--for reaction.

The following chart summarizes representative ways of describing the composing process.

Representative Ways of Describing the Composing Process

Blake, Cooper	Murray	Tuttle	Albion Model
Prewriting	Prevision	Stimulus Reaction to Stimulus	Stimulus Prewriting
Writing	Vision	Rough Draft Sharing, Revising	Writing Workshopping
Rewriting	Revision	Final Draft Submission	Rewriting Submission

Modes of Discourse

Assumption 4: The most effective writers generally are those who control the widest variety of modes of discourse, assume the largest number of writers' roles (personae) for the greatest variety of audiences.

This assumption formed the basis for our consideration of the possible range of written discourse and for our insistence that students experience as many kinds of writing as possible.

If our major goal in teaching writing is to help beginning writers develop their ability to control written language, as it is defined most fully, it necessarily follows that they should have continual practice with the major modes discourse, learning to implement a wide range of rhetorical skills for influencing many audiences. And the persons who become competent in the modes of discourse, we believe, will find they have no trouble using written language to get the business of the world done: to write reports and summaries and to fill out applications and assorted forms at least as well as those individuals who have been especially trained for these specific but narrow tasks. At the same time, these individuals will use writing as an intellectual tool: classifying, contrasting, organizing, defining, explaining, and making analogies. And, furthermore, they will, through the process of composing, learn more about themselves than they would have without writing, about their strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes, and possibly discover facets of their personality about which they were previously unaware. Most importantly, they may be surprised but delighted by their ability to control written language for their own purposes.

Once we were agreed that students need to have experience with many kinds of written discourse, we reviewed and analyzed the major schemes for organizing and describing the modes of discourse.

Aristotle's Modes of Discourse

The first scheme for describing types of writing is Aristotle's, later refined by the classical orators Cicero andQuintilian, and recognized by educated people through modern times. These are the four categories of discourse described by Aristotle:

1. Exposition--discourse intended to inform a listener or reader. Exposition now means a setting forth of meaning or intent, the precise statement of a definition, the explanation of something, or an elucidation of a matter.
2. Argument--discourse meant to persuade orchange the way of behaving of a listener or reader. Argument includes a course of reasoning aimed at demonstrating the truth or falsehood of something with facts or conclusions arrived at by logic given as proof or evidence.
3. Description--discourse intended to convey the quality of an experience to a listener or reader. Description means transmitting a mental image or impression with words to a listener or reader.
4. Narration--discourse intended to tell a listener or reader about an event. Narration means to give an oral or written account, to tell a story.

A contemporary adaption of Aristotle's rhetoric is E.P.J. Corbett's Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (1965)

The National Assessment of Educational Progress

Writing Categories

These categories were devised by the National Assessment of Educational Progess in an information-gathering project to survey the achievements of 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds, 17-year-olds, and adults (26-35) in writing. Detailed descriptions of the categories can be found in several U. S. Government Printing Office publications, Writing Mechanics, 1969-1974 (October 1975), Expressive Writing (November 1976), Explanatory and Persuasive Letter Writing (February 1977) and Write/Rewrite: An Assessment of Revision Skills (July 1977).

1. Explanatory--discourse intended to explain. When we use language to make something understandable, we emphasize message or content.
2. Persuasive--discourse intended to influence. When we use language to persuade, we emphasize audience.
3. Expressive--discourse intended to express one's feelings. When we use language in this fashion, we emphasize ourselves or the writer's role.

Kinneavy's Modes of Discourse

In Aims and Audiences in Writing (1976), James Kinneavy lists these six kinds of discourse.

1. Persuading Audiences. The language of persuasion is the language of politics, advertising, propaganda, public relations, government, religion and of daily arguments and debates.
2. Exploring a Problem. This is using language for discovering, for exploring the unknown.
3. Proving a Thesis. Here we give evidence for our belief in the validity of a solution.
4. Conveying Information. We use language to convey information to pass on ideas, facts, and conclusions to those individuals who don't have the time or interest to go through the original research to arrive at the information on their own.
5. Making Poems and Stories. When we create poems and stories, we use written language most freely. Words and structures are put together in unusual ways, played with, and relished. We use language artistically and expect our audience to understand and appreciate our special use of language.
6. Expressing Oneself. This category includes written discourse in which the author writes about what he thinks and feels without much concern for his audience. Such writing is that which is frequently private and spontaneous, including diary entries, autobiographies, and interview.

Britton's Discourse Types

The categories of discourse which James Britton identifies grew out of a study which Britton and others did of the writing of secondary school students in Great Britain, The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18) (1975). In his plan, Britton considers both the writing function and the audience for which each kind of writing is intended. At the center of his scheme is the notion, borrowed from the linguist Edward Sapir, most fully developed in his book, Culture, Language and Personality, of expressive speech. Expressive speech is language we use for communicating with intimate friends or close relatives. Since we use expressive speech with those we know we know well, we are at ease to express our ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Placing expressive discourse at the

center of his structure, Britton arranges it with two other function categories along with two audience roles on a continuum like this.

Participant role----------Spectator Role

TRANSACTIONAL_____EXPRESSIVE_____POETIC

1. Expressive. This mode is the central one by which we relate to others in speech, and it is the most accessible form for reading and writing, chiefly because we are communicating with an intimate audience. Expressive writing includes thinking out loud on paper which is intended chiefly for the writer's own use: diary entries, recording of feelings, moods, opinions, and preoccupations; personal letters to friends or relatives for maintaining contact; writing to a limited public audience, e.g., editorials; and writing for a public audience when the audience is considered to be a personal friend.

2. Transactional. This kind of writing gets the business of the world done. With it, we move to the participant role and address our messages to a public audience. With transactional language, we use language to tell other people what they want to know and use transactional writing to record facts, exchange opinions, explain and explore ideas, and construct theories; we use it to transact business, conduct campaigns, and change public opinion.

There are two main types of transactional discourse, Informative and Conative (related to changing behavior), with further subdivisions within the two major categories.

a. Informative. This is chiefly language to inform, including the following types.

(1) Record. When we record, we write down what the world is like at the moment.

(2) Report. When writers step back from their material to re-shape their notes, they may write a report.

(3) Generalized Narration. When writers draw conclusions from several similar occasions, they are writing generalized narration.

(4) Analogic, Low-level Generalization. With this type of writing, authors list strings of generalizations, one after another.

(5) Analogic. Writers here move to classify their data.

(6) Analogic-Tautologic. With this category, writers examine their generalizations to make them the subject of their writing.

(7) Tautologic. With this kind of discourse, writers move to constructing theories and stating propositions. In such writing, the generalizations are highly ordered and consistent.

b. Conative. Conative discourse, of which there are two kinds, Regulative and Persuasive, is intended to change behavior.

(1) Regulative. Regulative discourse includes instructions and directions for doing something. It may tell what is to be done, when and how something is to be done, and what should be done.

(2) Persuasive. In persuasive discourse writers assume their readers are individuals whose behavior, attitudes, or opinions can be influenced by reason or by any other type of rhetorical strategy. Whenever regulative discourse is backed by argument, it becomes persuasive.

(3) Poetic. In poetic discourse, writers use language to create pieces of

art like paintings or pieces of sculpture. They select and arrange the elements of language--sound, syntax, and semantics--with a conscious end in mind. Poetic discourse exists not as a means to a rhetorical end but as an end in itself.

Moffett's Spectrum of Discourse

The last model of discourse types we examined was that of James Moffett, first delineated in his book, Teaching the Universe of Discourse (1973), later developed in his college methods textbooks, A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13 (1973) and Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading, K-13 (1976) and exemplified in commercial materials for the elementary schools, Interaction (1973).

Following the notions of levels of abstractions and the developmental stages of cognition, Moffett proposes these general classes of writing, ranging from the least to the most abstract and from a sense of audience which is most subjective to that which is most objective.

1. Recording. This is writing of What is happening. Writers record on the spot what they observe. Recording is essentially chronological and in the present tense; it is the least abstract discourse.
2. Reporting. This is writing of What happened. Reporting is narrative, the result of eye-witness accounting of what occurred during an event.
3. Generalizing. This is writing about What happens and includes exposition.
4. Theorizing. Theorizing is writing about What may happen and includes theorizing about incidents and ideas by logical argumentation. It is the most abstract of discourse.

Moffett arranges these categories with examples of types of writing to exemplify the categories. Poetry occurs outside but along the complete spectrum because figuarative language cannot be located by sense of audience or by level of abstraction; it is more closely allied to symbol systems like art and music than it is to other kinds of writing.

Recording--drama of what is happening.	PLAYS	Interior dialogue Vocal dialogue	
		Correspondence	P
Reporting--narrative of what happened.	FICTION	Personal journal Autobiography Memoir	O E T
		Biography Chronicle	R Y
Generalizing--exposition of what happens	ESSAYS	History	
Theorizing--argumentation of what will, may happen		Science Metaphysics	

We reviewed the standard descriptions of modes of discourse and debated their advantages and disadvantages for use in the Albion program

First of all, Aristotle originally described his modes of discourse after observing orators making speeches intended chiefly to persuade. We found the chief weakness of the system its inability to include poetry, fiction, or drama.

Its main strength is its familiarity to most educated people.

The categories devised by the National Assessment of Educational Progress we found were reasonable and covered most kinds of writing mature writers engage in, but we decided the categories needed extensive qualification before they would be accepted by classroom teachers.

Kinneavy's scheme we found wanting for two reasons. The category of Exploring a Problem is one which we almost never find by itself; normally we explore a problem to prove a thesis or even to convey information, of which all functions contribute to persuading audiences to agree with a certain thesis or to take a course of action. Furthermore, the act of expressing oneself--as professional poets and novelists report--is central to making poems and stories, no matter how much the poets and novelists consciously polish the language in their works.

We found Britton's Discourse Types to enjoy several advantages. They reflect what mature adults generally write in contemporary society, not types of writing developed by those interested in theories of writing. The classes are detailed and comprehensive. Britton combines both the writing function categories with the sense of audience, and since Britton arrived at the scheme after studying the actual writing of school children, it is accessible for teaching purposes. The only apparent disadvantages of the Britton model are its complexity and unfamiliarity to all but few teachers of writing, and thus we believed it would be useful only after much explanation.

The Moffett Spectrum of Discourse we were convinced had several advantages. It is based upon two logical and fairly well-known concepts, Piaget's principle of decentrism (which states that as humans develop intellectually they move from a naive consideration of themselves to an objective awareness of the world around them) and the general semanticist's notion of levels of abstraction. It includes both the persona and functions of writing. It includes types of writing which are commonly produced--or can be taught naturally--in the schools. Furthermore, the labels for the types of writing are common ones, those for which teachers have shared meanings. But we agreed that the hierarchial model--from writing which is personal and subjective to writing which is impersonal and objective--was one which few teachers could wholeheartedly accept and use in their classrooms.

We finally agreed to use Aristotle's four categories of modes of discourse, with poetry added, as our model for describing types of writing, because, first, we believed we could gather almost all types of written composition done in the schools under one of the five categories, and, second, the categories were those which the majority of us knew and with which we felt comfortable.

Sentence Combining (Building Sentences)

Assumption 5: The mature writer creates sentences which are complex and varied; practice in sentence combining increases this skill.

We know that if students practice sentence combining problems of a special kind on a regular basis that they will produce sentences in their written compositions of greater structural variety and complexity than they would without sentence combining exercises. Kellogg W. Hunt first described the natural development of syntactic maturity throughout the school years (1965). John C. Mellon

found that middle school students, solving sentence combining problems with transformational grammar terminology, wrote more complex sentences than other students without sentence combining practice (1969). Frank O'Hare, however, demonstrated that middle school students who practiced sentence combining problems without grammatical terminology also wrote more complex sentences in compositions after regular sentence combining exercises than did students without such practice. (1971).

We know that the most advantageous time to begin a sequential program of written sentence combining for school children is at about the fourth grade; Roy O'Donnell found that during the fourth grade level, students' written syntax surpasses their oral (1967). If students were to increase syntactic maturity, we also know, they should have sentence combining problems reflecting sentences more complex than those they are already able to write (Loban, 1963). At the upper elementary school, middle school, and early secondary school levels, we realize that the critical kinds of sentence combining structures as identified by Hunt (1967) and Cooper (1973) are these: 1. problems involving sentence structures with long and varied nominals (many noun phrases and clauses in place of simple-word nouns) and 2. problems including a variety of adjective modifications.

One major criticism of any sentence combining program separate from the process of writing itself--a criticism voiced strongly by James Moffett (1968)--is that all sentence building should occur in a "naturalistic" manner as students write and revise sentences in actual compositions.

Another criticism of a sentence combining program, especially one with an emphasis on complex adjective modification, is that of Francis Christensen (1967), who maintains that the cululative sentence--in which phrases and clauses are added on to the initial main clause in a cumulative fashion--not the embedded sentence--in which phrases and clauses are embedded within the elements of the main clause--is the more characteristic sentence of contemporary prose writers.

Whatever the various positions on how to include sentence combining, we agreed essentially that all students, throughout every school year and over the entire school experience, grades K-12, should practice some form of sentence combining or sentence building. In the early grades, especially grades K-3, the practice would necessarily be almost exclusively oral. Beginning with grade four, though, and extending through the senior year of high school, students should in a regular fashion do sentence combining problems.

Within the broad category of sentence combining, we found many ways for allowing students to practice manipulating sentence structures.

Some sentence combining problems are unsignalled, that is, students are invited to combine sentence with no explicit directions.

Basic Sentences:
a. He walked.
b. It was through the wet grass.
c. It was along the sea's edge.

Combined Sentence:
He walked through the wet grass along the sea's edge.

Unsignalled sentence combining problems may be adapted from professional writing, such as this activity from Victor Scheffer's The Year of the Seal. With this type of problem, students learn the virtually infinite number of ways by which basic sentences can be combined in a paragraph.

Evening falls. The biologist sits. It is in his room. He relaxes. It is with his book. The book is his favorite. He reads about the chronicles of adventures. The adventures are Artic. The adventures are Antarctic. He reads with interest. He likes his cabin. It is on the shore of the Alaska sea. His cabin is surrounded. It is by mist. It is by fog. He hears sounds. The sounds are in the night. He hears the voices of the seals on the Reef. He hears the barking of a fox. The barking is distant. He hears the call of the birds. The calls are sleepy. The birds are night.

Other sentence combining problems are signalled, that is, elements to be embedded are indented under the main clause--the exact elements to be combined italicized--with directions for combining elements given as actual parts of speech, such as a conjunction (not as a grammatical term) included in parentheses after the elements to be combined. The process is complicated to explain, but as the students found, it is easy to follow.

The motorcycle is Art's.
  The motorcycle is the one with the paint job.
    The paint job is red.
    The paint job is white.
    The paint job is blue. (and)
The motorcycle with the red, white, and blue paint job is Art's.

We also made up sentence combining problems from literature selections which the students were currently studying. When the students worked such problems, they practiced sentence building and at the same time learned about the distinctive styles of effective writers. The first problem is from the opening paragraphs of Charles Dickens' Great Expectations; the second, from the beginning of Poe's "The Telltale Heart".

He had a head.
  The head was bare.
He had shoes.
  The shoes were broken.
He had a rag. (and)
  The rag was old.
  The rag was bloody.
  The rag was around his neck.
He had a bare head, broken shoes, and an old, bloody rag around his neck.

The eye fell. (Whenever)
  The eye was unholy.
It was on me
My blood ran cold.
I decided SOMETHING. (and)
I would take the life of the man. (to)
  The man was old.
I would rid myself of the eye forever. (and)
Whenever the unholy eye fell on me, my blood ran cold, and I decided to take the life of the old man and rid myself of the eye forever.

Grammar

Assumption 6: Although a knowledge of English grammar does not contribute to effective writing, students can profit from an understanding of grammar as a subject matter which is in itself intellectually stimulating and from a basic knowledge of grammatical terminology as an aid to understanding rules governing formal standard usage.

Within the subject of English, there is probably no topic more controversial than that of the study of English grammar, especially as related to the teaching of writing. Originally we had intended to exclude any consideration of grammar from the writing program because we knew that all studies dealing with grammar and effective writing showed no relationship between a knowledge of English grammar, whether traditional or moder, and the ability to write more mature, error-free compositions. J. Stephen Sherwin describes the situation like this: "The research is of sufficient quality to warrant the conclusion that instruction in formal grammar is an ineffective and inefficient way to help students achieve proficiency in writing." (Sherwin, p. 135).

Even though many teachers know that grammar study is not related to effective writing, many more teachers are unaware of this fact and spend more time than can be justified on instruction in English grammar. In effect, they hold tenaciously to the position that teaching grammar is somehow equated with teaching writing, but as they teach grammar, they are literally neglecting the actual teaching of writing. For such uninformed teachers, the instruction of writing through grammar becomes memorization, drill, filling in of blanks in workbooks, and recitation drill activities. Clearly we wished in our program to discourage these attitudes and activities.

In reaction to such ineffective and dreary methods of teaching grammar, critics of "formal" grammar instruction, most notably James Moffett (1973), maintain that all grammar instruction should be "naturalistic", that is, related to matters appearing in actual writing, with the teacher attending to the grammatical problems on a one-to-one basis with each individual student. Such a situation has merits except that for it to be successful, it must have teachers with a deep and mature understanding of English grammar, which, we believe, few teachers possess. Besides, we have found that most teachers advocating the "naturalistic" method of teaching grammar are themselves least knowledgeable about English grammar, have little interest in its study, and, as a result, in everyday classroom activities simply neglect it.

So why include any study of English grammar in a curriculum GUIDE for teaching writing? One reason is that, if the subject is taught with excitement, grammar can become intellectually stimulating and be justified on that basis alone. But beyond its potential as an intrinsically valuable academic subject, we believe the study of grammar does have a practical use and advance this second reason for its study: teachers and students alike need to agree on the meanings of a common core of grammatical terms as a basis for understanding principles of rhetoric and basic rules governing standard usage. Essentially, we agree with Paul B. Diedrich, Senior Research Associate of the Educational Testing Service, that, although we do not want teachers spending an "inordinate amount of time" teaching formal grammar and do not want them to teach grammar as a substitute for instruction in writing, we do believe that teachers and most students will find useful a working knowledge of some thirty to fifty technical grammatical terms. (Diedrich, 1974).

A word about the nature of the grammar used in the GUIDE. The Outline of technical grammatical terms included in the Scope and Sequence chart represents traditional grammar. This is so for several reasons. First, the experiment conducted by commercial textbooks during the sixties and early seventies to turn school children from the elementary grades through the senior high school into transformational grammarians failed. Most students found the study of transformational grammar entirely too difficult to comprehend, teachers had to teach themselves the subject matter through the student texts and teachers' manuals, and many teachers, when told in manuals that certain material was for their information only, insisted on presenting it to the children.

Besides, the most important discovery from the formal study of transformational grammar for school teachers is that the syntactic maturity of students of all ages will increase as a result of regular activities in sentence combining problems, which are based upon theoretical transformational grammatical operations, but with no transformational grammar terminology. So if almost all school children find formal transformational grammar study too difficult and if they are able to perform the most complex of transformations without knowing any transformational grammar terminology, then there appears to be no need to teach them transformational grammar.

We do, however, believe that an understanding of transformational grammar is indispensible for an analysis of style in discourse, but we further believe that stylistic analysis by the application of transformational grammar theory can be useful for only the most extremely able students in the upper grades of the secondary schools and therefore have not considered the subject in this GUIDE.

Although we do believe both teachers and students need to share a common core of technical grammatical terms, we do advocate approaches to teaching grammar which make for a balanced and interesting program. For instance, diagnostic tests of a knowledge of grammar should be given to students to find out who will profit most from such study. Teaching grammar should be individualized as much as possible, with students who need work with certain items studying on their own in handbooks. Drill for large groups should be short and as lively as possible. Common problems dealing with grammar can be incorporated into the composing process as skill exercises. And so forth. Essentially, teachers should make the study of formal English grammar as lively and interesting as possible, never forgetting that the study of grammar should never be substituted for instruction in writing.

Standard Usage and Diction

Assumption 7: In order to communicate effectively, especially in writing, students need to have a firm command of standard English usage and an extensive knowledge of English diction as well as methods for increasing their vocabularies and sensitivity to words.

We take it for granted that students, in order to become effective writers, must use formal standard English and show an every increasingly sophisticated sense of words, including the use of precise diction and figurative language. Although we know an awareness of words is crucial for the proficient writer, we are also convinced that the study of words by itself, like the study of formal grammar, should never become a substitute for the writing process.

There is no doubt, furthermore, that students need to learn standard formal English usage. They may get this information from exercises in textbooks, although the material on usage in texts is frequently dated, so with the help of their teachers they should check usage items in recent dictionaries and in the writing of contemporary authors in current newspapers and periodicals.

Students should learn to use words with precision by a variety of activities: working in dictionaries on etymologies and variant meanings, using concrete and abstract words, and writing examples of figurative language such as similes, metaphors, synecdoche, and metonymy.

Students should participate in a regular program for increasing their vocabularies by extensive reading and discussion of unfamiliar words encountered by the study of word history and word borrowing, especially those from Greek and Latin, and by activities in word attack skills like the use of word roots and affixes.

Mechanics and Conventions

Assumption 8: The effective writer has a confident command of the mechanics of written communication (spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) and of the conventional format of written composition.

Again, it is taken for granted that effective writers must spell, punctuate, capitalize, and produce pieces of writing which follow the conventions established by successful writers, what editors call "good, clean copy". There is no question but that the final draft of any composition should be error-free; the problem is how best to teach students to achieve such a state of grace.

We are all aware that attention to mechanics and standard format belong in the editing stage of the composition, but we are not as aware of the most effective way to teach these skills. For years, many teachers believed that if students were taught usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation in exercises separate from actual writing, they would write compositions free from these errors. When it was found that students who did well in exercises dealing with mechanics still did not write error-free compositions, the accepted position was to give upper elementary school and junior high school students (primary and early elementary school children had not developed a sure enough command of written language to profit from extensive instruction in mechanics) much drill and practice in mechanics so when they became high school students, they would have no need to worry about such mundane matters.

Unfortunately, the first report on the ability of nine-, thirteen-, and seventeen-year olds to use writing mechanics in compositions for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1970) largly dispells this notion. Three findings from this study are related to the topic of drill in writing mechanics. (Mellon, 1974). First, the results showed that except for spelling, students at nine, thirteen, and seventeen all showed approximately the same percentage of mechanical errors in their written compositions. Thus, it is not true that at age thirteen, students make the greatest number of mechanical errors in their compositions. Second, seventeen-year-old students, those in the senior high school, do not write error-free compositions, therefore, the task of teaching students to eradicate mechanical errors from their compositions cannot be accomplished by the junior high school. It may very well be that seventeen-year-

olds continue to write compositions with mechanical errors--at the same percentage rate as nine- and thirteen-year-olds--because they are trying out novel forms not attempted when they were younger and less mature, such as more sophisticated phrasings, parallelism, new words, and more subtle diction. And third, all factors considered, what we had known all along, mechanical errors were found to be a minor aspect of the total composing process. "Thus, although some editing and directed proofreading is essential at all ages, there seems little reason to continue to give students in grades five through seven the especially large doses of error-correcting practice they typically receive." (Mellon, 1975, p.32).

How do we teach students to eliminate mechanical errors in their compositions? Again, some teachers would have all instruction of mechanics "naturalistic", that is, with the teacher addressing those errors at the time they appear in each student's composition. Although such a procedure is acceptable for some teachers, it is not for those who wish assurance that certain common items are taught to all students; some sort of instruction,therefore, separate from the writing process or integrated within the writing process, in short, varied, and interesting activities, seems advisable. As far as spelling goes, students need to develop a "spelling sense", learning various spelling rules and a number of common "spelling demons" but generally paying continual attention to spelling words correctly, especially in the editing stage of the composing process.

Workshopping

Assumption 9: Except for the first drafting stage in the composing process, students should be encouraged "to workshop", to take advantage of the other stages in the composing process--prewriting, revising, and editing--as opportunities for interacting with other people, both students and teachers,as a means for getting feedback about their writing.

Interaction, we are confident, is at the heart of the writing program. Most teachers have not been trained nor feel comfortable in letting their students talk to each other in the classroom, before or after they have written the first draft of a composition, and they raise questions like these about the procedure: How can students help each other to write better? Won't they talk about everything but the writing at hand? What will the administrators say when they hear such a noisy classroom? How can I allow students to read papers and talk about them in pairs or in small groups when I have thirty-seven kids?

And these are legitimate concerns, too. For "workshopping", the idea that when people work together, criticizing and offering feedback for each other's ideas, they produce better pieces of writing than when they work completely alone, the idea that "composing is the curriculum", is a revolutionary one for most teachers.

What we found, though, was that when teachers tried workshopping in their classrooms, tentatively and timidly at first, when they began to trust their intuitive feelings about how they knew writing should be taught and when they began to have faith that their kids want to write about matters close to them and discuss their compositions with each other, if allowed to, amazing things happened.

Students began to point out problems in their writing and in the writing of others, many times as accurately as the teacher. The students sometimes did discuss matters other than those directly related to the specific piece at hand,

but, we frequently observed, that the topics were at least indirectly related to the writing under discussion. And if workshopping did become noisy, the noise was that of kids discussing matters related to writing, not just the commotion of gossip and horseplay.

Generally we wanted teachers to establish an atmosphere in the writing classroom in which students learned to accept the teacher and other students as "trusted readers",with whom they could trust their ideas and feelings. In a workshop situation, individuals learn to give realistic praise and to describe weaknesses, omissions, and errors but to be sensitive about not making caustic comments which might destroy the beginning writers' confidence in themselves as individuals and as writers. Such an attitude is especially true at the beginning of the school year or at the start of a class in writing, when inexperienced writers are particularly vulnerable to criticism.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assumption 10: Teachers and students need to measure growth in writing by assessing improvement in complete pieces of discourse by a valid measure, such as the holistic scoring evaluation of writing, the improvement of which can be assigned a grade.

How we assess writing is directly related to how we teach writing, and our assessment procedures directly reflect our instructional measures. The procedure, states Mellon, writing on the assessment of writing by school children for the first National Assessment of Educational progress, is the same for assessing as for teaching writing and involves basically two steps: 1. setting a topic and 2. commenting on the results by describing each writer's successes and failures at every level, ranging from overall quality to the narrowest mechanical matters. "In short, we teach writing largely by assessing it, and the lesson we can learn from problems encountered in assessment used in measurement are applicable also to assessment used in teaching." (Mellon, 1975 p. 34)

The procedures for assessment and evaluation we arrived at, then, were partly a result of the lessons we had learned from work such as Mellon's and of our experience with teachers and students.

First, we were determined not to give grades, either numerical or letter, to individual compositions. Most of us knew from experience that marking up compositions with red and assigning them grades created an antagonistic situation between the teacher and student, just the opposite of the environment we knew was conducive to effective writing. Paul B. Deidrich expresses our position well: "Grades generate anxiety and hard feelings between students, between students and teachers, between students and their parents, and between parents and teachers." (Deidrich, 1974, p.2)

Second, we were aware of just how complex an intellectual, emotional, and physical task writing is and knew how inadequate conventional measures--like counting errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and standard usage--were. In fact, we knew that researchers had discovered that conventional methods of evaluating compositions, like correcting usage and mechanical errors, were actually damaging because as students concentrated on them, they neglected other writing matters like audience, writer's role, and tone. (Deidrich, 1974, p. 4)

On the whole, we knew that knowledgeable researchers are convinced that reliable scores on pieces of writing and essay examination responses can be

obtained only by a process of assessment like this. (Deidrich, 1974; Cooper, 1975) Students write two to four pieces of varied kinds of discourse, for example, explanatory and expressive, separated by a considerable length of time in the school year, say in September or October and then again in April or May. At least two teachers rate independently each paper; those they cannot agree on are read by a third reader. The raters do not mark the papers, nor do they assign grades to them. They rate each paper, spending no more than two minutes with each, according to a holistic rating scale developed by teachers and possibly with the cooperation of students. If there are four papers to be read, there are thus four ratings for each paper which are then averaged for a total combined score, the scores which may then be rank ordered twice, once for the entire student body and once for each grade level. With this data, teachers have available valuable information about the writing ability of students in the school and can answer questions like these: Who were the strongest and weakest writers in the school? Which freshmen can write better than the weakest juniors? Or, which seniors are weaker writers than the strongest sophomores? Such information, of course, could be useful for planning various writing programs.

Before we discuss the assessment procedures advocated for the Albion program, it is necessary to review the types of rating scales considered. We had trouble arriving at clear definitions of the various writing scales, but we found that this is not an unusual state of affairs, since the researchers who had developed the scales themselves disagree about labels and definitions. Besides, our aim was not so much to formulate a precise definition as it was to choose a scale which would be most appropriate for improving instruction throughout the classrooms of the school district. Essentially we found the rating scales fell into one of two general categories, those being atomistic and holistic.

Atomistic scales are those which include particular features commonly associated with the skill of writing such as vocabulary, conventional usage, and manuscript mechanics (spelling, punctuation, and capitalization). Although these instruments may be more reliable and cheaper to use than other measures, they are not valid instruments because they do not assess entire pieces of discourse.

Holistic scales, on the other hand, do deal with entire pieces of discourse. Such scales may be expensive to develop and use, but since they assess whole pieces of discourse, they are potentially the most valid of composition rating devices.

One of the original kinds of holistic rating scales is that with categories supposed to be generally characteristic of all writing. One of the best known of these scales is the following one, developed by Paul B. Deidrick. (1974)

Deidrich Rating Scale

Topic _____ Reader _____ Paper _____

	Low	Middle			High	
Ideas	2	4	6	8	10	
Organization	2	4	6	8	10	
Wording	1	2	3	4	5	
Flavor	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Usage	1	2	3	4	5	
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5	
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5	
Handwriting	1	2	3	4	5	_____
					Sum	_____

The first four items and the last four,which make up a single category of writing mechanics, represent the five factors of effective writing identified by Deidrich. Teachers who originally used the scales wished to give double weight to the elements of "ideas" and "organization", even though Deidrich found no evidence in reasearch that such weighting was appropriate. (Deidrich, p. 54)

The chief criticism of the Deidrich scale is that it can be applied only to expository writing and does not reflect elements of other kinds of discourse like persuasive or expressive. Furthermore, such a scale does not reflect the extent to which the writer has considered a particular audience or the writer's role.

Since the Deidrich scale was developed, several individuals have created rating scales which are improvements upon Deidrich's original model. A full discussion of some different scales--such as the essay scale, dichotomous scale. feature analysis scale, and the "center of gravity" approach--is found in Cooper's paper, "Holistic Evaluation of Writing". (Cooper, 1977)

Both analytic scales and primary trait scoring devices, which may be grouped together as holistic rating devices are valid and powerful methods for assessing improvement in student writing. Holistic devices share these characteristics.

Characteristics of Holistic Rating Scales

A holistic rating scale for written composition

--stops short of listing linguistic, rehetorical, or informational features of a piece of writing.

--does not require the rater to stop and count or tally the incidents of a feature, e.g. spelling errors or faulty diction.

--does include a list of features, sometimes with a narrative description of low, middle, and high characteristics of each feature, as a way of assessing the piece as a whole.

--prohibits the rater from making any corrections or revisions of the composition.

--directs the rater to assess the paper in terms of how appropriate are the features of the piece of writing to the audience for which the writing is intended; the scale is a complex blend of audience, speaker's role, purpose and subject required by that kind of writing.

Both holistic devices--analytical scales and primary scoring devices--are developed in essentially the same way.

Guidelines for Devising a Holistic Rating Scale

1. Define the universe of discourse, e.g. Aristotles's, Britton's, or Moffett's system.

2. Identify the mode of writing to be assessed within this universe, e.g. explanatory,persuasive, and expressive.

3. Develop inductively the features of the particular piece of discourse with the mode, such as autobiography, by analyzing many pieces of published professional and student writing of varying quality in the mode as well as critical and theoretical essays about the mode; by evolving a list of the essential features of the mode; and by finally describing in nontechnical terms what are to be considered low, middle, and high quality levels for each feature.

4. Devise exercises for students which sample the mode of writing precisely, including audience, writer's role, and message.

5. Frame the writing activities and set up the classroom atmosphere to ensure that students will cooperate and produce a piece of writing which is as full a measure as possible of their ability to write in that mode under the constraints of an examination situation.

6. Use the scoring guides to assess the samples of writing.

For the Albion program, we wished to use holistic scoring guides not so much for research but as a means for improving instruction in teaching writing. We planned for the rating scales to become models for teachers and students alike to assess compositions, inevitably as a realistic basis for grading.

We recommend that the holistic rating scales be developed and used like this. The teachers would develop inductively a scale for each mode of writing from the universe like this one on autobiographical writing.

COMPOSITION #_____ Evaluator:_____

EVALUATION SCALE: AUTOBIOGRAPHY

	LOW					HIGH	
TONE: Mixture of humor and seriousness	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
PERSONAL VOICE: has many "I's" and "me's"; personal touch; first person point of view	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
DETAILS: sufficient details; enough but not too many	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
REAL EXPERIENCES: happenings seem to have really occurred	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
ORGANIZATION: structure clear; either chronological or use of flashbacks	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
OPENING: grabs your interest right away	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
ENDING: makes you want to know what happens next	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
MECHANICS (spelling, punctuation, capitalization, correct usage): not crucial but important	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
					TOTAL		_____

COMMENTS:

This evaluation scale was developed by one of the consultants with a class of ninth graders, who were completing a school assignment to write an autobiography to be used by the guidance department. The students read samples of autobiography in their literature anthologies and wrote and rewrote drafts of autobiographies. After the students had read drafts of their autobiographies

in pairs and small groups, they, in full class discussion with the consultant, developed the features of a successful autobiography. In the preceding scale, the phrases in lower case are the comments by the students; the capitalized heads were derived by the consultant. The last element of MECHANICS was added by the consultant because the students were loath to include it on their own.

Notice that the descriptions of the features are included in the scale. Unlike other holistic scales, though, only the characteristics of the high features are described.

We found the system of assessing writing using such scales to have several advantages. After the initial development of the scale, the students knew in advance what the features were of an effective piece of a particular mode of discourse before they started writing. The students, as they referred to such scales could help each other identify strengths and weaknesses in drafts of compositions. And the teachers as well could help the students improve their compositions without worrying about the adverse effects that grades, either high or low, would have on the willingness for the students to continue to improve subsequent drafts of the same compositions.

So much for assessment of compositions. As far as evaluation was concerned, we suggested that the grading of compositions be handled in this manner. Each student kept a writing folder in the classroom, the folders which were alphabetized--and then numbered for ease of use by students--in a filing cabinet drawer. Toward the end of a marking period--when a grade was required--the teacher would examine each individual's folder and in this fashion arrive at a grade. First the teacher would note effort. Had the student at least attempted the writing activities? Second, the teacher would in a holistic fashion, from a "general impression", assess the student's writing improvement over the marking period. And third, the teacher would direct each student to choose his or her two or three best pieces and use them as a basis for a conference with the teacher. After the conference, the teacher assigned a grade. Such a process may seem impractical, but in practice, there were few times when there were serious disagreements about grades.

Altogether the procedure has obvious advantages over traditional systems. The student is given a grade based upon a willingness to attempt writing and on his or her best, polished work. The grade is decided upon cooperatively by the student and teacher. The student has a clear idea of how he or she is graded. And the teacher doesn't need to mark up all papers extensively and agonize over grades for each of them; he or she reads only final, finished pieces. Most grades for the writing, therefore, are almost all high because students and teacher alike have a clear-cut idea of what improvement in writing means. And best of all, the teacher can spend his or her time in helping students actually improve their writing and not in arguing with them over their grades.